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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines, within the higher education context, the difficulties which instructional developers often encounter in gaining cooperation to achieve their goals. It is argued that instructional development in the university involves a paradox in that a great deal of money is provided for the improvement of instruction, but an environment remains which encourages everything except the improvement of instruction. Some of the elements of the paradox are identified, i.e., developers must approach student-centered goals through faculty-centered activities, faculty incentives conflict with teaching responsibilities, and some students have negative attitudes towards the results of instructional improvement activities. Recommendations are made for ways of counteracting these difficulties, but it is argued that the problem is ultimately one of the organizational structure of the university. Changes needed in this structure are described, including the need to alter the faculty incentive system so that more emphasis is placed on teaching and instructional improvement. (10 references) (Author/EW)

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Chapter 33

ID in Higher Education: A Paradox

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Many instructional developers in higher education confront difficulties in gaining cooperation in achieving their instructional improvement goals. The difficulties are not usually caused by the people with whom the IDer must interact but rather by the institution itself. In higher education, for example, developers must approach student-centered goals through faculty-centered activities; faculty incentives conflict with teaching responsibilities, and some students have negative attitudes toward the results of instructional improvement activities. This chapter analyzes these problems and poses some answers for the IDers who must deal with them.

The state of the art of instructional development in higher education is perhaps best described as a paradox. Very often it seems that instructional developers are hired to do a job that nobody really wants done. Or, put another way, higher education invests substantial resources for the improvement of instruction and then provides a myriad of diversions which attract faculty attention away from instruction. The purpose of this chapter is to identify some of the elements of this paradox for the instructional developer-in-training and the instructional developer not employed in higher education and to introduce some thoughts regarding actions instructional developers might take to counteract particular elements of this paradox. Included in this paradox are the following: developers must approach their student-centered goals through faculty-centered activities; faculty members perceive their roles as researchers rather than teachers; faculty incentives conflict with teaching responsibilities; the university's commitment to conflicting interests affects instruction; developers often make commitments to faculty needs which conflict with student needs; developers are confronted with the ethical problem of whether to improve what should not be done at all; declining enrollments influence instructional improvement; and some students have negative attitudes toward the results of instructional-improvement activities.

The focus of this chapter is upon major universities as the setting for the paradox facing instructional developers in higher education. Inflation and declining enrollments have so affected the resources available to higher education that only major research universities rich in research grants and in service contracts can make substantial commitments to instructional development. Many small colleges and universities commit their total resources to instruction but even then lack the means to invest in instructional development. Emerging colleges and universities often aspire to a more exalted status and commit their resources to research activities. Excluded from consideration in this chapter are programs that train instructional developers and instructional development activities in professional schools such as the health sciences. Each of these related areas have their own states-of-the-art which merit independent consideration.

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The treatment of the paradox of instructional development in the major university is not intended to be hypercritical. The authors view the varied interests and needs of the university with mixed degrees of empathy and frustration. It is the nature of the university to be diverse; it must serve many audiences and purposes. In contrast, it is more in the nature of instructional developers to be very goal-oriented and impatient with anything which distracts from meeting the defined goals.

ID: STUDENT ORIENTED BUT FACULTY CENTERED

The paradoxical nature of instructional development is clearly illustrated in that instructional improvement, a student oriented goal, is only achieved through work toward curriculum revision, course revision, and the improvement of teaching techniques--all faculty-centered strategies. Teaching grants, seminars on teaching techniques, in-class observation, evaluation, and consultant services make up the bulk of the repertoire available to most instructional developers for persuading faculty members to engage in instructional improvement activities. Faculty are completely free in most cases to exercise control over the degree and quantity of their instructional activities. Academic freedom protects them from all but the most cursory scrutiny. Nothing short of outright student rebellion would generate any significant interest from colleagues or from the administration in a professor's instruction. If seems fair to say that faculty members are basically free of any external compulsion to assume the difficult tasks urged on them by instructional developers. Instructional improvement, when it occurs, is a result of the internal compulsion among some faculty members to be good teachers.

FACULTY PERCEPTION OF ROLE

Perhaps the most fundamental dilemma is the difference between the developer's perception and the faculty's perception of the role the professor. While instructional developers view the professor primarily as a teacher, very few faculty members share that view. Most faculty members consider themselves artists, historians, chemists, or engineers, and have never given any real thought to their roles as teachers, or any serious consideration to the nature of the teaching task. Often faculty members accept a position at the university because that is the only organization which provides them the time and resources to engage in research of their own choice. Many faculty members sacrifice significant personal income to gain freedom to research, and often make vital contributions to human understanding and quality of life as a result. Very few faculty members have a genuine appreciation for, or have devoted much energy toward, considering the general education of students. Most expect students to perform as superior scholars in their discipline. Impatient with less-than-outstanding performance, faculty members have considerable difficulty in understanding students who do not share their vital interest in the discipline. In a sense the faculty believe the weeding-out of unsatisfactory scholars to be their most important role as teachers. They frequently are unable to perceive their discipline with the perspective of the student from an outside field. The faculty expect the student to measure-up to the discipline rather than expecting the discipline to contribute to the general educational development of the student. Perhaps the major task of the instructional developer is to persuade faculty members to perceive themselves as educators--each with a role in the total development of the student.

FACULTY INCENTIVES

Probably the most profound dilemma facing the instructional developer in higher education is the conflict between the teaching role of the faculty and the incentive system of the university. Instructional developers try to persuade faculty members to divert significant time and resources from research to instructional improvement activities. The systematic design of instruction requires a major commitment by a faculty member--a commitment far greater than most could justify within their system of priorities. Persons committed to teaching give it first priority and expend whatever energies and resources are necessary to meet student needs effectively. Unfortunately, the incentive system in most universities does not permit faculty members to give teaching first priority. In fact, university incentives are designed to punish faculty members for devoting significant amounts of time to teaching in lieu of research. At some point in each faculty member's career s/he must 'go up' for tenure. At that time the faculty member is evaluated regarding her/his potential for contribution to the university. Prior to tenure evaluation faculty members undergo a probationary period during which they establish a productivity record. The productive faculty member is one who publishes a significant quantity of research and/or generates resources through grants or service contracts. In these times of fierce competition for limited resources universities cannot justify retaining faculty members who do not produce. The probationary professor must demonstrate clearly her/his potential for production or else lose the faculty position.

UNIVERSITY COMMITMENT TO CONFLICTING INTERESTS

A major source of the paradox facing the instructional developer in higher education is the diverse nature of the major research university. There are, perhaps, too many competing forces pulling the university toward conflicting goals. Most universities espouse the philosophy of equal attention to teaching, to research, and to service.

The notion is that research keeps a professor creative and up-to-date and thus improves teaching. Equally important, research permits the faculty to serve the public by adding to the fund of existing knowledge and offering expertise in practical applications in the field. While faculty members have clearly-defined responsibilities for meeting classes, keeping office hours during which to see students, and maintaining quality programs, the university at the same time exerts tremendous pressure on faculty members to enhance the university's reputation by publishing research in her/his field. Most university administrators lust after the fame and fortune accrued by being rated as one of the leading universities in "fill-in-the-blank." National recognition brings not only prestige to the university, but fortune in the form of grants and service contracts. The more sophisticated equipment and facilities, of which universities are so proud, are usually paid for by federal and private grant monies. A substantial number of teaching salaries are very often acquired as a part of a research grant or service contract. A number of graduate students are subsidized through teaching and research assistantships paid for by grants and contracts. Many courses and programs can be offered at the university only because the faculty and facilities were acquired through research grants and/or service contracts. In many universities substantial teaching resources are funded through direct and/or indirect grant support. Instructional developers, faculty developers, media specialists, instructional evaluators, and test and measurement specialists are provided as consultants to aid the faculty in their teaching responsibilities. Faculty are expected to teach well and are provided with substantial instructional resources; however, the incentive system supports professional activities which produce material benefits for the university, rather than instructional improvement activities. High-quality instruction is important to the individual students and to society in general, but high quality instruction rarely pays off with material benefits for the university. There is a direct correlation between faculty research and service activities and grants and contracts which is not evident for teaching activities. Typically the faculty are content with the university incentive system because it rewards them for activities which are congruent with their career goals. Paradoxically, the instructional developer is in the position of threatening the "golden goose" by encouraging faculty members to shift their priorities toward teaching.

FACULTY NEEDS CONFLICT WITH STUDENT NEEDS

Another dilemma of the instructional developer is that s/he is often placed in the position of serving institutional and faculty needs which conflict with the best interests of students. Many faculty members make their first contact with instructional developers when they want help in creating a special convention or workshop presentation or when they must prepare print or nonprint materials required by a service contract. Often faculty members commit themselves to extravagant multi-media programs for professional presentations at national meetings, or to brochures, modules, videotapes, and/or slide-tapes for national circulation under contract to business, industry, or government agencies. Eager to "look their best," faculty members seek the assistance of instructional developers and media specialists in the design and preparation of these projects. The instructional developer is confronted with a multi-faceted dilemma: first, these projects are probably very worthwhile in their own right, but they are not intended for classroom use; second, participation in the development of these projects diverts the instructional developer's attention as well as that of the faculty member away from classroom activities; third, scarce institutional resources intended for on-campus instructional purposes are diverted to enhance the personal careers of faculty members. With minimal modification some of these special projects may be used in the classroom. Of course, such "add-on" projects will not benefit students very much if total course revision is actually needed. Instructional developers cooperate with faculty members on these projects in the hope that an avenue of communication will be established which will lead to later instructional improvement activities. It is also hoped that the experience of designing and producing these projects will provide faculty members with instructional development and media utilization skills that they will apply in their regular instructional efforts.

ID: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Somewhat related to the conflict between serving either student interests or faculty interests is the ethical question of whether to improve an instructional project which should not be done at all. The instructional developer is often called upon to design a specific instructional package with learning outcomes and instructional strategies specified by the professor. In this situation the developer may design an instructional project which is very effective in teaching inappropriate objectives. Sometimes the developer may suspect that thorough problem-analysis would indicate other, more desirable, learning outcomes. Of course, the developer is limited to an attempt to persuade the professor to engage in a more systematic analysis of the problem. Such persuasion is often not effective with faculty members who believe they know the problem and are impatient to achieve a quick solution so that they can go to "more important matters." Firm insistence upon further analysis would more than likely result in the termination of the project by the professor. Ever present is the hope that prolonged contact with faculty members will influence them toward more effective instructional improvement projects.

In effect the instructional developer must choose between participation in the design of inappropriate instruction or the loss of any hope to influence faculty members to participate in effective systematic design of instruction.

DECLINING ENROLLMENTS

Declining enrollments contribute to the dilemma of the instructional developer. Higher educational institutions are typically funded according to the number of students enrolled. A primary instructional responsibility of faculty members is to maintain a sufficient number of students so that all their courses "make." In the past, increasing enrollments have guaranteed sufficient students not only to "make" the courses but to justify the acquiring of additional faculty members and the expansion of facilities. Today's declining enrollments are resulting in greater effort by the faculty to recruit and retain students. In some universities declining enrollments provide instructional developers with the basic elements of an incentive system to attract faculty members to instructional improvement activities. Students with options among multiple sections of courses simply will not enroll in sections taught by faculty members with bad teaching reputations. Faculty members threatened with seriously declining enrollments may be forced to attend more closely to instructional matters. Unfortunately, in some universities the faculty combat declining enrollments by offering new degree programs which are attractive to students. A decline in career opportunities forces many students to pursue advanced degrees rather than face unemployment. Proliferation of advanced degree programs is especially popular among the faculty because these programs carry the prestige of being research-based, and thus are more closely aligned with their personal career goals. Instructional developers, with their focus upon the needs of the student, question the propriety of faculty members protecting their own positions by encouraging students to pursue degrees for which there is very limited hope of future employment. Also, as long as faculty members meet their recruitment responsibilities through offering advanced degrees, there is little incentive to recruit and retain students through the improvement of instruction.

NEGATIVE STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARD INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

The new instructional developer may find that one of the most baffling dilemmas is that students, the ultimate benefactors, don't always appreciate the results of instructional development. Students are frequently disconcerted by the course-design changes that instructional developers recommend. For example, developers often recommend the adoption of criterion-referenced in place of norm-referenced evaluation of student learning. Also, when appropriate to the learning objectives, developers recommend strategies which require more active student involvement in the instructional events. Finally, developers strive to make changes in the instructional design which will maximize the opportunity for all students to master the course content.

Bright, grade-oriented students are frequently quite content with the norm-referenced grading schemes which still predominate in higher education. These students know that they can 'beat out the pack' in such a competition in virtually every course they take. Even the not-so-bright students who are well back in the fray feel confident that they can do better than at least some of the others--and doing better than only a few is enough to pass most college courses. The point is that none of these students will welcome the instructional developer who threatens to spoil their college years with evaluation schemes that attach grades and "passing" to the demonstration of absolute achievements rather than relative ones. Some students would rather not be informed with clarity about what they do not know and cannot do; they would prefer to remain confident of their place in relation to other students, assured of steady progress toward their degrees as long as the reliable failures among their ranks stay at the rear. After all, in most classes there will be a percentage who are sufficiently distracted, lazy, emotionally disturbed or otherwise confused to ensure success for the others; the others count upon it.

There are also those students who have settled comfortably into the passive student role traditional in most college courses; they have mastered the lecture-text-memorize-repeat process. Systematic analysis and redesign of their courses is likely to disrupt their world in a number of ways. Cognitive goals for the course are sharpened and memorization is supplemented with higher level learning expectations. Instruction via lectures and text alone--or at all--may no longer be appropriate. As a result, teaching strategies might include discussion, audiotutorial, PSI, discovery learning, and/or a host of other variations which require active student response rather than passive absorption. Students perceive this shift as "more work" rather than as "improved instruction." Evaluation--which is very close to the student's heart--is almost certain to change as a result of systematic design. The low-level multiple-choice test or playback essay is replaced by the assessments demanding comprehension (yes, even comprehension questions upset students), application, analysis, and beyond. Out-of-class projects may be required--and the assignments to be re-done until they meet specific standards! While the task-analysis and the strategy-selection components of instructional development often make previously-difficult material easier to learn, the standards of achievement, in terms of the required demonstration of competence, are usually raised as a result of systematic design. As McKeachie (1979) has pointed out, while students are fairly good judges of when they are learning and when they are not,

they are not good judges of what they ought to be learning. Consequently, one cannot expect them to greet higher standards with gratitude for a more solid education. Couple the higher standards with a shift to criterion-referenced evaluation--in effect removing the refuge of the curve--and students will very likely be UPSET. Really, from their viewpoint, "Who needs it?!" "Life used to be so simple."

Another small group of students that will be less than delighted with the results of instructional development efforts are those whose academic prowess determines their self-esteem. They are scholastic-athletes. Within reason, these students tend to value instruction to the degree that it is abstruse. As incredible as it may seem, they prefer dull, complex instruction--the further removed from the "real world" and the more difficult to apply, the better. They don't seem to feel that they are "in college" unless learning is tough. Why? because, quite simply, if everything is clear and everybody understands, they aren't recognized as special any more. These students are almost always bright individuals, and the typical college course provides them with lots of strokes. Vague goals, inefficient and inept instruction, and norm-referenced tests guarantee that those high in general ability will be identified as superior every time--the smart kids love it. These students would tend to dislike instructionally-developed courses because the higher-quality instruction allows many more students to perform at the highest levels. And of course, mastery-learning schemes in which many students earn As are the ultimate threat to the scholastic-athletes; their very identity is lost.

Resolution of the dilemmas facing instructional developers in higher education is not at all assured. At stake is the restoration of balance among the teaching, research, and service missions of the university and the survival of instructional development programs. But in a sense, the very existence of instructional development programs is a form of recognition that something is wrong and evidence that there is some commitment to correcting it.

Instructional developers are unique among the groups competing for the limited resources of the university in that developers by definition are commited to the campus-wide instructional mission of the university. Administrators and the faculty, though each is committed to instruction, tend to rank teaching lower in their system of values than other professional interests. Campus administrators are most deeply commited to the promotion and protection of the interests of their particular institutional entities, and the faculty tend to be most deeply commited to achieving professional recognition through research and grant contracting. Instructional developers, in order to promote the improvement of instruction, must assume the task of motivating administrators and the faculty to heighten the value they place upon teaching. It should be noted here that merely heightening the value of teaching may not be enough. There is a tendency among much of the academic community to think of teaching as a blessed gift. Even those who fervently wish to be better teachers may not realize that teaching is amenable to systematic improvement. Developers must increase the perceived value of teaching and encourage the demystification of it.

Typically instructional developers have done very little on a campus-wide basis to affect the motivation of administrators and faculty members regarding instruction. Modest instructional improvement grants, faculty development seminars on teaching techniques, and publicization of services through a newsletter have been sufficient to keep developers busy and provide the illusion of progress toward a campus-wide impact on instruction. However, these activities are static, in the sense that they depend upon a faculty member's predisposition to participate voluntarily. Embarrassingly low student evaluation ratings, hopes that automated instructional innovations will provide more free time for research, and, occasionally, a genuine commitment to teaching excellence provide most of the impetus for faculty participation. If instructional developers hope to resolve the dilemmas they must adopt a more proactive program aimed at motivating faculty members who would not normally place teaching at a priority level sufficient to predispose them toward instructional improvement projects.

Initially the obvious target for developer attention would be reform of the university incentive system. After all, increased rewards for instructional activities would have a dramatic impact upon how faculty members rank teaching in their value system. Further analysis reveals two problems related to concentration upon incentive system reform for the resolution of the dilemmas. First, the faculty members serving on promotion and tenure committees and administrators doling out rewards are not convinced that the incentive system is wrong in its bias towards non-instructional activities. Even if it were possible to mandate incentives for instructional activities, faculty members and administrators would devise means to most highly reward those activities they hold in highest regard. Secondly, formal incentives would result in the adoption of technological innovations easily noted and rewarded by the administration but which may not genuinely reflect a commitment to the importance of teaching (Kozma, 1979). Instructional developers should direct their efforts toward persuading the faculty to perceive an intrinsic system of rewards for teaching activities.

If faculty members value teaching sufficiently they will engage in instructional improvement activities for reasons of personal satisfaction and they will reward colleagues for their teaching activities as well.

Instructional developers must concentrate their efforts, identifying and implementing strategies which will stimulate faculty members to heighten the value of teaching in their system of

priorities. One example of such strategy is a campaign to introduce instruction as a campus-wide topic of conversation (Spitzer, 1977). Faculty tend to be too specialized in their professional interests to communicate easily with most colleagues outside of their immediate fields. They, like most other people who do not share mutual interests, communicate about current events they have read or heard about. Topics common to the experience of everyone, such as campus politics, sports, or the economy, form the basis for much of the communication among faculty. Developers could introduce instructional topics into this communication stream by maintaining in campus publications a constant flow of interesting items about teaching. A series of articles centered around in-depth interviews of influential faculty members about instructional methodologies, descriptions of on-campus instructional innovations, and a series introducing divergent faculty opinions on controversial instructional issues are examples of topics that could stimulate faculty discussion with colleagues. Faculty members would tend to value teaching more highly and take a more active interest in developing articulate positions on instructional matters if they noted that influential colleagues were expressing views on these subjects. Faculty members who discuss teaching not only tend to value it more, but would consider instructional issues in terms of their own classes and make more-informed decisions about instructional matters related to their own teaching. They would be more alert to their colleagues' teaching practices and, through expression of their interest, reinforce good teaching. Finally, faculty members would tend to practice themselves what they reward others for doing.

Obviously, the conversation strategy is but one example of a single element in a campus-wide campaign to improve instruction through stimulating the faculty to place a higher value upon teaching. The example was meant to illustrate the notion that the state-of-the-art requires developers to adjust the focus of their efforts. In addition to continuing their good work with faculty members on specific instructional improvement projects, developers must give more attention to campus wide concerns. In a sense, when one considers that the dilemmas facing developers in higher education are a reflection of the imbalance among the teaching, research, and service missions, the authors recommend that instructional developers take on the role of the conscience of the university.

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